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ABSTRACT

This digest offers camp leaders, outdoor experiential educators, school and college faculty, or youth agency staff who are interested in nurturing youth leaders a framework for designing youth leadership programs which employ an outdoor setting as a "leadership classroom." Basic categories for leadership theory are defined: trait theory, situational leadership, organizational leadership, power, and ethical assessment. Key elements in shaping an outdoor setting into a supportive community are discussed: staff, setting, and scheduling. Essential elements forming the core framework for curriculum development are identified: revisioning, empowerment, action, and reflection. Learning modules proven successful in National Youth Leadership Council leadership training programs are described: moral and ethical simulations, adventure challenge, community building, service learning, performing arts, and action planning. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of 12 programs employing all or a portion of the elements of youth leadership development mentioned in the digest are listed. (NEC)

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ERIC DIGEST

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

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OUTDOOR CENTERS AND CAMPS: A 'Natural' Location for Youth Leadership Development

I. Why Leadership and the Outdoors?

For years camps and outdoor programs have served as laboratories for youth leadership development. Young people have typically been placed in roles where they are called on to initiate projects, supervise camp activities, or take charge of groups of people. Most outdoor programs depend on young people to assume key leadership roles in their organizations.

This staff development pattern has been augmented in recent years by efforts to transform camps into leadership education settings where not only the junior staff, but the entire outdoor community, is intent on developing leadership capacities. This digest offers a framework for designing youth leadership programs which employ an outdoor setting as a "leadership classroom." Camp leaders, outdoor experiential educators, school and college faculty or youth agency staff who are interested in nurturing youth leaders and who see a role for outdoor settings in the process should find this digest useful.

II. Born in the U.S.A.: What is there to live for?

Growing up has never been easy and in recent years the transition to adulthood has become even more problematic. Gone are the classic agrarian patterns of apprenticeship and mentoring by adults which led to a series of intermediate jobs and, finally, a career track.

Instead of moving steadily to full adult responsibilities, many young adults are caught in an isolated, relatively unproductive period of life where little is expected of them except to prepare for the next, more useful stage. Moreover, instead of viewing adults as essential allies in their journey, older people are often perceived as judgmental and non-accepting barriers to progress. A 1985 Minnesota Youth Poll which sought opinions from over 2,000 high school students throughout Minnesota revealed that over 66% felt adults had a negative view of them. The study was replicated in the Chicago area where nearly identical results were obtained.

Society has responded to the alienation of modern youth by focusing almost exclusively on the fallout: drug use, dropouts, unwanted pregnancy, suicide, and crime. Massive resources have been mobilized to deal with the "problem" of youth. This medical model of responding to the illness rather than creating a proactive climate of wellness for youth has become dominant over the past 30 years and successes have been few.

Although not the prevailing approach, there is a countervailing chorus supporting "positive youth development" as a means of engaging alienated youth. Key to this model is the need to treat young people as resources and leaders in the community rather than as afflictions requiring treatment. Young people, in this approach, are asked to serve on community boards, to design service projects, and to play a more active role in the governance of their schools.

With interest growing in this style of youth development a demand has been created for leadership training to prepare youth for expanded community roles. Camps and outdoor programs are well positioned to play an increasingly important part in offering youth leadership programs appropriate to this newfound interest area.

III. Adult Leadership Development

Creating a youth leadership program in an outdoor setting requires some understanding of leadership theory. Unfortunately, most of the literature has been developed around business or military applications.

Leadership theorists typically categorize leaders on the basis of how they accomplish tasks and/or how they arrive at positions where they can perform the tasks. Some basic categories for leadership theory and their definitions are:

Trait Theory: Since leaders are presumed born to lead, leadership is assumed to involve building on existing strengths.

Situational Leadership: A popular approach now making the lecture circuit, situational leadership is matching different styles to differing settings.

Organizational Leadership: In this style, being a leader is related to a role in an organization. Position thus defines the leader.

Power: Leadership is assumed to be a function of power, of making things happen.

Ethical Assessment: Here, morals, ethics and reflection form the basis of leadership. Concern for the "good" of others is central to this understanding of leadership.

A typical leadership education course involves review of these leadership theories, personal assessment using instruments like the Myers-Briggs personality inventory, simulations or case studies, time for personal reflection,

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and opportunity for personal feedback.

Most adults who participate in leadership education are either already viewed as leaders or are slated to assume positions of responsibility. However, for young people entering a leadership course, there often is not the same sense of destiny or personal expectation. Granted, some young people view themselves as being able to make a contribution later in life, but few see themselves as valued current contributors to society. Leadership remains a distant, vague concept applicable perhaps to sports teams and school clubs, but not to larger contexts where it would be expected to make a difference.

Nothing less than a whole new way of viewing the world is required of young people if they are to break away from their stagnant assumptions into the acceptance of vital responsible roles where they can assume and exercise leadership. Camps and outdoor programs can become communities where this transformation can begin.

IV. Youth Leadership: A Transformation Process

Helping youth break out of self-imposed and socially reinforced restraints to active leadership roles requires a carefully designed educational process. Particular attention must be given to underrepresented groups such as people of color and women who, at an early age, are often "traced" away from leadership roles. These youth stand to gain particular benefit from leadership education as they confront barriers of race and gender and influence others in addressing these barriers.

COMMUNITY: At the heart of creating a youth leadership program in an outdoor setting is the shaping of a supportive community. Key elements are:

Staff. Staff should mirror the ethnic and gender diversity of the students. There is no more clear message to underrepresented groups than the example of staff with whom they can identify. Staff should also represent, through their life experience, a commitment to leadership in some area. Active, confident leaders whose character and skills exemplify the ideals of the program should operate the program. This is the key ingredient in building community.

Setting. An isolated camp or wilderness setting where distractions from the outside are minimal is ideal. The physical setting should represent a dramatic contrast from the everyday world in which young people live.

Scheduling. Intensity is more important than length of experience. Many effective residential program models are between 7 and 10 days in length. Length, however, is not the best predictor of program success, but rather the degree to which participants are fully engaged in the program is. The model of the 24-hour extended wilderness experience can be applied to the leadership camp setting through careful program design. Effective programs often go from dawn to dusk, with every element (morning conditioning to evening speakers) integrated to relate to the goals of the program. Learning theorists reinforce this emphasis, suggesting that degree of intrinsic motivation and involvement on the part of the student are the key variables in learning.

PROGRAM DESIGN: The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC), a national non-profit organization dedicated to developing service-oriented youth leaders, has identified four key elements essential to a youth leadership development program in an outdoor setting. These elements form the core framework for curriculum development. Later, specific activity modules will be tied to the frame to complete a program design.

Revisioning. Young people must see themselves and be seen by adults as important contributors to community development--in contrast to how youth are seen today.

Empowerment. Young people must further begin to perceive themselves as powerful. This is accomplished through guided participation in acts of leadership, citizenship, and community service. When young people realize that they can make constructive impact upon the environment and others, it becomes possible for them to feel empowered. It is, after all, powerlessness, not power, which corrupts.

Action. Young people have not learned leadership until they have carried significant responsibility on their own. Once they are viewed as being able to lead and know that they are capable, they must enter the arena of leadership by initiating a project or by providing direction to a group.

Reflection. After engaging in an act of leadership, it should be judiciously processed or reflected upon. As John Dewey, one of America's foremost educational philosophers emphasized; "Learning is thinking about experience." Consolidation of learning through intentional reflective activity is essential if the understandings and competencies are to be transferred to other settings.

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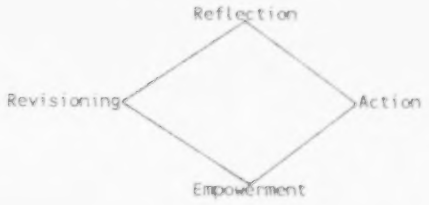

PROGRAM COMPONENTS: The evolution of the NYLC Youth Leadership model began with analysis of contexts where young people have historically been called to lead: war, athletics, and the arts. All are settings demanding an element of stressful performance preceded by intense, directed training. Challenge--physical and/or intellectual--is central to each. Training is experiential or "hands on". Outcomes are clear and consequential.

Isolated, residential outdoor centers or camps are ideal for youth leadership training. Using the sequence suggested earlier, specific outdoor activities can be creatively blended into an effective youth leadership curriculum. Outlined are learning modules which have proved particularly successful in NYLC leadership training. Also indicated are the design elements the modules reflect.

Moral and Ethical Simulations [Revisioning, Empowerment, Action, Reflection] Moral dilemmas have a tendency to draw out leaders or challenge them to emerge.

NYLC has created day long simulations using canoes and lengthy overland travel. Themes can be built in to add interest. An all-night adventure has been created, for example, to simulate Black people escaping the South and traveling the Underground Railroad during the 1850's. Everyone has a role and discussion gets hot after spending all night in the woods as slaves and slave catchers.

Leadership skills and moral decisionmaking can be fused in creative, life-like adventures that require young leaders to decide and act.

Adventure Challenge [Empowerment, Action] High level physical challenge activities, such as ropes courses, rock-climbing, and backpacking, have long been associated with personal development. They are particularly useful in a leadership course to help young people "see" themselves as capable and powerful. Special emphasis should be not only on encouraging youth to experience the adventure activity, but also to play a role in leading/facilitating others in the process. Students should be taught to belay fellow climbers, for example, as well as to rock-climb themselves.

Community Building [Revisioning, Empowerment, Action] Residential camps are ideal for creating intentional communities where democratic leadership processes can be used to develop a sense of community. Leadership courses should do more than talk "about" leadership, they should demonstrate it by sharing community responsibilities with young people.

Service Learning [Revisioning, Empowerment, Action, Reflection] Leadership and service should be thought of as cointentional goals in youth leadership development. Service sites are settings where leadership skills can be practiced. Service also becomes an ethical outcome, answering the question, "Leadership for what?" Camps have plenty of program possibilities for guided service projects. Physical projects can include trail construction, tree planting, and facility renovation. Often neglected, but very successful, are human service projects that use the leadership community as a base for ranging out into the communities surrounding the camp. Performing arts groups for example, have been sent out to conduct vaudeville shows for senior citizen centers or teams of youth have gone to homes of elderly people to do maintenance work.

It is essential to the concept of empowerment that young people perform powerful and meaningful activities such as these. Reflection on these acts helps young leaders begin to see themselves as valuable contributors to their own communities back home.

Performing Arts [Revisioning, Empowerment, Action] Performances can often be viewed as "light" entertainment for the camp scene. In a leadership course they should be taken seriously as important forms of expression that have strong potential impact upon the presentors and the audience. Roleplays on racism, cultural performances of dance and music, and street theatre with political themes have been very effective in leadership courses. Revisioning is encouraged through performance as young people become not only actors on the camp stage, but presentors of important ideas and themes. Art also brings many young people into an empowered new world of personal development--getting on stage can be analogous to standing on the edge of a 150 foot rappel.

Action Planning [Revisioning, Empowerment, Reflection] Secluded outdoor settings are ideal for making plans for application of leadership skills. NYLC and other leadership organizations culminate their courses with planning sessions which ask participants to envision projects they wish to take back home.

Action planning is a particularly effective reflection tool to help leadership students consolidate skills learned during the course. It is also empowering as young people come to realize that they are expected to do something authentic and that they are to be a part of the plan for the projects they will launch. As an outgrowth of action planning, empowered teams of leadership students have implemented projects to address the needs of homeless teens, refugee youth, the drug culture in their schools, and many other needs.

V. Youth Leadership: A New Challenge for Outdoor Education

As young people move toward maturity in our society, they want to be needed and respected for their skills and ability to contribute. Formal education has not been effective, by itself, in developing curricula that will prepare youth for active community participation.

Camps and outdoor settings over the years have proved to be ideal environments for developing leaders for the outdoors. The residential outdoor context is also appropriate as a classroom for developing leadership capacities that can be applied beyond the outdoor setting. Outdoor educators, in partnership with schools and community-based organizations, can play an important role in shaping this timely educational field. Youth leadership education requires an understanding of the social context of Western youth, effective employment of experiential education methods in outdoor settings, and a means of insuring that new leadership capacities are applied.

The most effective youth leadership projects combine an action-based, intensive outdoor experience with a continuum of community-based, follow-through activities. Caring adults working with youth at every stage are essential.

Research conducted at Pennsylvania State University and at the University of Minnesota suggests that programs designed to include the principles outlined in this digest can have a significant impact on the personal development and leadership capacities of young people.

The following list of programs employ all or a portion of the elements of youth leadership development mentioned.

National Youth Leadership Council
Center for Youth Development and Research
386 McNeal Hall
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, MN 55108
(612) 624-2719

-- Northeast Leadership Project
Peter Bailey
University Settlement

184 Eldridge Street
New York, NY 10024
(212) 674-9120

-- International Youth Leadership Conference
Stuart Shepley
Bradford Woods
5040 St. Road 67 North
Martinsville, IN 46151
(317) 342-2915

-- Southwest Youth Leadership Project
Darl Kolb
Santa Fe Mountain Center
Rt. 4, Box 34C
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 983-6158

-- Indian Youth Leadership Project
McClellan Hall
Box 96
Pine Hill, NM 87357
(505) 775-3366

-- Youth Leadership Council (Canada)
Jim Neale and Tony Richards
6230 South Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 1T8
(902) 424-1796

-- Khmer (Cambodian) Youth Leadership Project
Lheung Khi
Catholic Charities
Old Sixth St.
St. Paul, MN 55101
(612) 222-3001

East Bay Conservation Corps: Youth Leadership Project
Joanna Lennon
1021 Third St.
Oakland, CA 94607
(415) 272-0222

California Conservation Corps Training Academy
Bud Sheble
California Conservation Corps
1530 Capitol Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 445-0307

City Volunteer Corps Training Academy
Gail Kong
National Service Corporation
842 Broadway
New York, NY 10003
(212) 475-6444

Youth Community Service, Constitutional Rights FDN
Cathy Burger Kaye
Youth Community Service
601 South Kingsley Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90005
(213) 487-5590

American Youth Foundation
Robert MacArthur
1313 Anne Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63000
(314) 772-8626

Leadership America
Stan Altschuler
1600 Two Turtle Creek Village
Dallas, TX 75219-5419
(214) 526-2953

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University of Minnesota
St. Paul, MN

March 1988

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ERIC DIGEST

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

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A 'NATURAL' LOCATION FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

by

James C. Kielsmeier

March 1988

ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE ON RURAL EDUCATION and SMALL SCHOOLS

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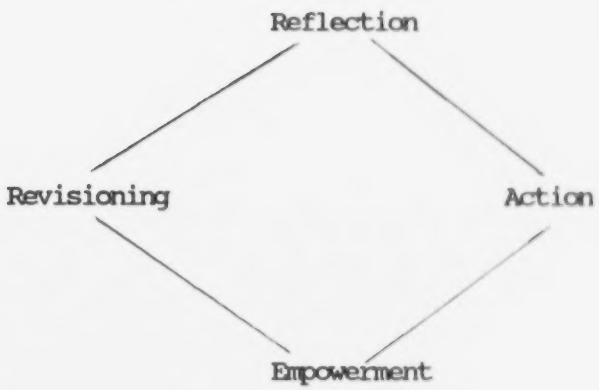

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(212) 674-9120

— International Youth Leadership Conference
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Bradford Woods
5040 St. Road 67 North
Martinsville, IN 46151
(317) 342-2915

— Southwest Youth Leadership Project
Darl Kolb
Santa Fe Mountain Center
Rt. 4, Box 34C
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 983-6158

-- Indian Youth Leadership Project
McClellan Hall
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Pine Hill, NM 87357
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-- Youth Leadership Council (Canada)
Jim Neale and Tony Richards
6230 South Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 1T8
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-- Khmer (Cambodian) Youth Leadership Project
Lheung Khi
Catholic Charities
Old Sixth St.
St. Paul, MN 55101
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East Bay Conservation Corps: Youth Leadership Project
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City Volunteer Corps Training Academy
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American Youth Foundation
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Leadership America
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